



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME EVIDENCES OF THE ROUTE FROM THE LAKES TO THE GULF.

BY DR. J. H. GOODELL, MARSEILLES, ILL.

This article is written to give some of the historic evidences of the connection of the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River by way of the Chicago River, Mud Lake, Des Plaines and Illinois Rivers.

It is designed to show the routes of travel along these bodies of water used by the Indians and early French residents; to give also some of the reasons why the employment of such routes became necessary in the first instance, and finally a beaten track by the exigencies of the times. It also shows the origin of the first permanent white settlements in the Mississippi Valley, tracing the occupation of the country in order of time by the French from the St. Lawrence River to New Orleans.

The discoveries of the French in this western world from the St. Lawrence River, where they landed in the 16th and 17th centuries, followed the Great Lakes and contiguous rivers from Montreal to New Orleans. The dates of occupation of the various settlements made follow each other in a reasonably consecutive order. Between the cities mentioned one of the principal settlements during the latter part of the 17th century was at Fort St. Louis (Starved Rock), in Illinois. This fort was occupied for twenty years, much longer than Fort Frontenac at the outlet of Lake Ontario; Fort Conti on the Niagara River; Fort Miami on the St. Joseph River or Crevecoeur below Peoria, all established by the great explorer La Salle.

In 1534, James Cartier entered the St. Lawrence River. Champlain founded Quebec in 1608, discovered and named Lake Champlain in New York the following year. In 1615, four Franciscan priests came to Canada. These followed

along up the lakes with missionary zeal founding a notable mission at Georgian Bay in 1615. The efforts of the priests in their attempts to christianize the native Red Races were marked with self-sacrificing zeal and un-assailable heroism. No class of men during that age abandoned so cheerfully the comforts of civilization, or gave their lives so willingly, or accomplished for their Church so much as did these scions of some of the noble houses of France, ever sustained by the hope of advancing the religion of the Master. The explorer was not always first in the finding of a new country, but in many instances the priest had preceded him, and indeed, in all the explorations the priest was at his side. He has left his impress on the Indian character to soften it and inspire him with religious aspirations, naturally for the priest's own Church, but its civilizing influences have come down to our own day. In so much have these missionary priests benefited humanity. During the early years of the 17th century the priests and fur traders had made a general and quite thorough survey of the Great Lakes. They had learned from the Indians resident there, if these nomadic people may be said to have a residence, the existence of a great river to the west that discarded its waters into the salt sea. Marquette who had established the mission of St. Ignace near Macinaw in 1666, in connection with Joliet were sent by Talon, Intendant of Canada, in 1674, to find this river. They returned by the Illinois, Des Plaines and Chicago Rivers to the Great Lakes. In the following year Marquette gave up his life to establish the mission of the Immaculate Conception at the Indian town Kaskaskia among the Illinois Indians near Starved Rock. In 1682, La Salle descended to the mouth of the Mississippi, claiming all the lands drained by the Great River for his King. In December of the same year, Tonty, by direction of La Salle, began the erection of Fort St. Louis (Starved Rock), or La Roche, as it was afterwards called by the French people, to distinguish it from other forts of the same name in America. This fort was abandoned about 1702, Kaskaskia and Cahokia hav-

ing been founded. Shortly after the year 1700, there were at least five French villages on the American bottom near St. Louis. There is no doubt but that individual French settlers had made homes for themselves among the various tribes of Indians from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi river. They assimilated with the red race, quite readily adopting their methods and customs, and, indeed, marrying the Indian girls and raising families of half-breed children. Settlements progressed down the Mississippi river until 1718, when New Orleans was founded, nearly forty years after La Salle, descending this mighty river, had claimed for his king all the land drained by its many tributaries.

It will be seen that New Orleans or the land about it was first approached from the north. When La Salle made his memorable claim for his king, the Spaniard had not yet discovered the mouth of the Great River, as he was so absorbed in the quest for gold in Mexico that he did not notice the great avenue to the interior country. Previous to this, in the summer of 1542, Ferdinand De Soto, a Spanish explorer, had crossed the Mississippi, and, dying of a fever, was buried in its turbid waters, but no claim of discovery was ever advanced by his sovereign to the adjacent territory.

The settlements about the American bottom near St. Louis, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, St. Anne, Prairie du Rocher, as well as those west of the Mississippi, were not in existence until after 1700. Judge Sidney Breese has made an exhaustive study of the facts relating to the earliest records of occupation, and states that the records of baptism of the Mission of the Immaculate Conception at Kaskaskia kept by the Jesuit Fathers begin March 20, 1695, and have been kept continuously ever since.¹ These were the earliest written records he was enabled to discover. Fort St. Louis (Starved Rock) was abandoned as a French post in 1702. It appears then that the settlements were projected from the north in the first instance. After De Iberville had made

¹Breese, *Early History of Illinois*, p. 141.

a beginning at the mouth of the river near New Orleans, there were doubtless many people who came up the river from France to the settlements on the American bottom. With this influx of whites among the Indians there were many who, aside from priests, were descendants of noble houses in the mother country. The motives actuating them were as various as those of the present day when some social or intellectual leader goes out into the wilds to live.

After Fort St. Louis was abandoned these settlements on the Mississippi became prominent. It will be remembered that Kaskaskia was the first capital of Illinois. The rivers and lakes were the highways in those early times. The trackless prairies, with their enormous growth of vegetation, were left to the buffalo and the deer; in fact, so luxuriant was the grass that one could not see very far ahead, many instances occurring of "lost on the prairie." The rivers would carry the boats of travelers in the direction in which they ran, and if the trails over the portages were known, afforded ready ways of communication. These trails were no doubt of Indian origin. The routes thus established have become prominent today, the early means of transportation, the birch bark canoe, fixing them in certain localities where only these frail vessels could be of service.

The birch or elm bark canoe was the carriage used by all—the Indians, the Explorers and the Missionaries. They were of many sizes, but the largest ones were most used because in the long journeys it was necessary that there should be something of a force of men to overawe the wandering bands of Indians they might meet on their travels. They were often 30 feet long, 3 feet wide at the center and capable of carrying 3,000 pounds besides eight or ten courier de bois, or voyagers, as the French called them, for the propelling power. The writer was reminded of these canoes by seeing recently some of the residents of Bayou La Fourche in Louisiana kneeling on their knees in their frail

dugouts made from cypress logs and paddling rapidly by, guiding them readily with their paddles.

The birch bark canoe was easily made from material at hand and quite as readily repaired. Although from the want of a keel they were, as sailors say, "cranky to handle," they were light enough so that two persons could carry the largest of them readily over the many portages encountered on a trip. They were also quite frail, an awkward stroke of the paddle might set them against a stick or stone, producing a rupture that might require repairs.

They were always loaded away from such possibilities, the load being carried out to them from the shore. Every portage required the unloading and the transportation of goods and canoe overland to still water where they were reloaded again. Paths were formed around rapids and dangerous places that were called portages. A portion of one of these trails was shown the writer many years ago by an early settler of Marseilles, where the rapids of the Illinois are there miles long. With all their frailty and many disadvantages, their ease of construction and repair and their lightness made them the most useful boat for the Indian, explorer or missionary. Pirogues or dugouts made from a log of wood were too heavy to carry over the portages and would check or crack in the sun so that they could not be repaired on the way. They were never used except where there were no rapids.

Perhaps some idea of the difficulties and dangers of travel at that time can be obtained by briefly describing the carrying of the annual crop of furs purchased at Fort St. Louis (Starved Rock) to Montreal. In the spring, the Indians coming in from their winter's hunt, gathered at their summer camping grounds about one mile west of The Rock. When all of the several parties had come in and the trading was completed, the beaver skins, which were the principal article of trade, were bound up in packs of from 60 to 90 pounds weight. The birch or elm bark canoes, prepared during the winter, were loaded out in the stream away from the shore, one of the *courier de bois*

carrying the packs out while another of them stored them in with great care to get as many in as possible for their long journey. Each canoe must carry its allotted amount of furs and the ten *courier de bois* as well, who knelt as they used their paddle at the side. When all of the season's catch had been loaded the flotilla was ready to sail. Sometimes there were ten canoe loads if the catch had been large, even more than this number would start out from the fort with the boom of a gun. At the first portage all the furs must be unloaded and, with the canoe, carried over the land and reloaded again in still water. If portages were frequent, the men were wet all day or until they could dry themselves by the fire at night. This mode of life originated the custom among them of sleeping with their feet toward the fire to ease their rheumatic pains, from which they were great sufferers. This was only a part of their difficulties. They must live by the game they could secure on the way, and must guard themselves from hostile bands of roving Indians, particularly the Iroquois, who dodged their steps almost from the time they left the fort until they reached their destination. These hostiles sought to isolate a canoe if they could and, silently over-powering the voyagers, steal the furs. It was an extremely dangerous life, and many a voyager left his bones to whiten on the trail.

The command of these flotillas was always entrusted to one who had been over the route sufficiently to know the best camping places, the portages, the springs and rivers, as well as all the lurking places for hostiles.

When the flotilla reached the junction of the two rivers that form the Illinois, there were two routes open to them to reach Lake Michigan. One followed the Kankakee River through its swamps to the vicinity of South Bend, Indiana, where La Salle had constructed as an outpost Fort Miami, to the portage of the St. Joseph River and down this to the lake. The distance over this portage was quite long and the back travel quite an item in their long journeys, especially as the miles of water traversed were measured by oar strokes. By this route they were

exposed to attack from roving bands of hostiles concealed in the excessive vegetation of the swamps if it was not burned off. The other passed up the Des Plaines, through Mud Lake and the portage there, which in the spring freshets was almost deep enough to float the canoes. This portage was about nine miles long in dry weather, but in the rainy seasons the water course was a succession of small lakes readily traversed by the canoes. After entering Lake Michigan, either at the mouth of the St. Joseph or the Chicago Rivers, should hostiles trouble them they could go out from shore beyond reach.

It usually consumed the summer to make the trip to Montreal and return. On one of Tonty's trips to Montreal, he was two months on the road, traveling light. The canoes of these flotilla were loaded with furs going and goods for the next season's trade returning. They were often detained on the way by a leaky canoe, for if any one was held back for any cause all were detained, the flotilla always keeping together for self-protection. Sometimes game was scarce or a hunter would wander too far away, stopping the party at various times along the way. Parched corn and dried buffalo meat were the only articles of food taken with them at the start—never, however, sufficient for the entire trip, the party depending on their own hunters for supplies for the journey. As before stated, the location of camps was known to those who had traveled the route before. Upon the arrival of the party at the camping place preparations for the meal were at once begun. A fire was built, provided there were no hostiles about to be attracted by it or the smoke, and the inevitable individual camp kettle hung over it with a mixture of parched corn, dried buffalo meat and water in it to cook. Like the Indian, each individual had his own kettle as much a part of his outfit as his hatchet or knife. Wherever he went he carried it with him, and at his death it was often placed beside him in his grave.

A camping place to be acceptable must have good water and must be so situated as to require but few guards; it must be located on the side of the stream crossed nearest

the destination in order to avoid detention by it, should a sudden storm arise and a flood occur. Wood for cooking the simple stew and the general fire was also desirable.

Hunters were sent out for game, upon their arrival, usually very abundant, because the camp was pitched at or near some spring frequented by the buffalo and deer. While preparations for the evening meal were in progress, the canoes were unloaded, the packs of furs secured on the ground and if it rained, the canoes turned bottom up over them to keep them from getting wet, increasing their transportation weight. If it was dry, the packs were put together, and the voyagers slept underneath these birch bark canoes. Had they suffered a break anywhere it was repaired. The principal reason for the removal of the canoe from the water was their liability to become water-soaked, rendering them exceedingly heavy for transportation over the portages.

Immediately upon landing, sentinels were placed in all directions, for whenever a party traveled with a large quantity of beaver skins it was a great temptation to hostiles to steal upon them and take what they could. It was therefore necessary for the leader of the party to secure his stock as seemed best to him at each landing place. In this connection, it is well to remember that the hostility between the Illinois and Iroquois nations was of that character that neither gave nor asked quarter, and also that other fact that when the Iroquois had exhausted the fur-bearing animals in their own vicinity, they were urged by the British traders to seek them in the west, a course of action which tallied very well indeed with their adventurous and warlike character. The flotillas held the year's catch, and were consequently well guarded until they reached their destination. The Kankakee swamps being directly in the line of travel of the Five Nations toward the Illinois, furnished abundant lurking places in their rank vegetation for roving bands of hostiles and would very naturally be avoided by the flotillas and a shorter route taken by way of the Des Plaines, Mud Lake and the Chicago River

to Lake Michigan. When they arrived at the lake, they could easily go far enough from the shore to avoid their enemies. From Starved Rock east to where the Des Plaines and Kankakee form the Illinois the various tribes, or perhaps we should say settlements of Indians were friendly to the Whites. There are numerous portages in that distance, one of three miles long at the Grand Rapids of the Illinois. A friend of the writer, who has for many years collected Indian and French relics in this vicinity, told him that there were the sites of ten Indian towns located between Marseilles and Seneca, a distance of five miles only. One of these sites the writer visited. It is located just at the head of the rapids. It is possibly thirty or more acres in extent and was the abiding place of probably 10,000 Indians. A very large spring brook of very excellent water runs through its western edge. About a half-mile south, the bluffs rise perpendicularly nearly 75 feet. Large old trees skirt the river's edge, which was always full of fish. At its eastern edge an old trail mark exists, running up onto the bluff and toward the Vermilion timber some twenty miles away. It is much cut down below the level of the ground, and gives evidence of a large amount of travel. At one place in this site, the rock comes to the surface, and a hollow has been formed that appears to be like a mortar to grind the corn of the tribe. The sites of these towns are determined by the large amount of broken pottery, flint chips, arrow heads, celts, or skins, stone axes and other Indian relics. Some French axes and silver ornaments have also been found here. Naturally, these Indian towns would protect those who brought them those things they desired and would see that they got through to the lake in safety.

After the meal and the watch for the night had been set, the travelers gathered about the fires listening to some mirthful or adventurous story, after which, each told over his beads in a solitary vesper service, or if some priest was returning to his chapter-house with the party, mass was said and then each one sought his earthly couch. With a

different setting of scenery the same methods of camping were enacted day by day until the flotilla reached its destination.

There is a limestone ridge around the lower end of Lake Michigan whose highest elevation varies from ten to twenty miles from the shores of the lake. The lowest point is in the swale through which the Chicago drainage canal passes and which, before the historic period, formed one of the outlets of the basin of the Great Lakes. The Kankakee river rises east of this ridge in Michigan, flowing in general direction south and west until it joins the Des Plaines nine miles east of Morris, Illinois, to form the Illinois river. West of this ridge in Wisconsin rises the Des Plaines, flowing southwardly to join the Kankakee. Outside of this ridge the water shed is into the Mississippi river, inside into the St. Lawrence. It will be observed that to reach the missions on the upper lakes from the Illinois valley, the point of entrance into the Great Lake region must have been at the Chicago river. By the Kankakee route, the distance was longer and the portage much more difficult because of the exposure entailed from the rank vegetation along the way where lurking bands of hostiles could secrete themselves. These dangers induced La Salle to build Fort Miami near South Bend, Indiana, as an outpost. It was situated at this place to catch the first indication of an Iroquois approach, and a runner familiar with the lay of the land could be sent out to the Illinois to put them on their guard. For many years, there was no fort at Chicago, but the exigencies of travel in that early day demanded some kind of a fortification, perhaps not as large as the inland fortress at Starved Rock, but of sufficient size to protect the French in their many journeys to and from the Great Lakes. From the Illinois valley to the lakes, the Chicago route was very much shorter, and the French people were among friends and allies who would aid them in difficulty. When Marquette attempted to return to the Illinois in the fall of 1674, to found the Mission of the Immaculate Conception near Utica, Illi-

nois, he was attacked on the way with a severe return of the malady with which he suffered during the previous year. He was so prostrated that he entered the Chicago river, passing the winter in a cabin erected somewhere near South Center St. He probably located here to be ready to seek his dusky friends when his disease abated.

The Indians always separate in the fall, each band going off by itself to its own hunting preserves, if we may so term them. In the spring they all come together again in their annual gatherings. Marquette probably was fully cognizant of this fact, as all the priests of that time were, withholding his presence among the Illinois until such time as he could be in proper condition and see the whole tribe together.

In 1681, before his discovery of the Mississippi, La Salle met at the mouth of the Chicago River refugees of King Philip's Tribe as well as members of other tribes, confederated with him, who had been driven out of New England after the death of that Chieftain, whom he persuaded to join his colony on the Illinois. Students of history are familiar with the terrible fear that the Iroquois inspired among all the tribes of the continent. Obviously, any tribe would seek protection under any leader whose ability was able to successfully cope with this great league. This prestige the French acquired in their first successful battle with the Mohawks and for which the Five Nations became their enemies. Notice that the meeting place was at the mouth of the Chicago River.

After the French and Indian war, when a large part of North America was turned over to the British nation, the people of Arcadia in Nova Scotia, all or nearly all of French extraction, were driven out, finding homes along the lines of travel of preceding years. Some of these settled in Detroit, others in northeastern Illinois and northwestern Indiana, on both sides of the Mississippi, at Kaskaskia, Cahokia or the other centers of population that had grown

into settlements there. Some of these Arcadians found homes on the bayous of Louisiana, where their descendants still reside.

A very pertinent question often comes up: Why did the French come into this interior continent by the Great Lakes? At the time of La Salle's great discoveries, for he was the central moving spirit in bringing to the knowledge of the world the Great Northwest and its great river, the Catholic religion was dominant in France. Louis XIV projected an expansive policy for his kingdom—to make of France the leading nation of the world and at the same time advance the Church of Rome—his church—to its former commanding position, depleted, as it had been, by the reformed church. The contention between the two methods of worship, the Catholic and the Reformers, was exceedingly fierce and bitter, no quarter being shown to the conquered of either party. During the early part of the 17th century a series of British settlements were projected and established from Cape Cod in Massachusetts to Jamestown, Va., which eventually became strong and powerful. These were all Protestant, or at least upheld the Protestant religion either from religious preferences or for political purposes. No Catholic discoverers would be permitted to project their enterprises through this cordon. The British traders bound the Iroquois to their interests by giving more for the furs the Indians brought in and selling goods to them at a cheaper rate than the French. In this way that fierce and bloody nation became a guard over the Protestant settlements in their weakness. Situated as they were along the eastern shore of the continent, the only approach to the Great Northwest open to the French was by the Great Lakes. The zeal of the nation for territorial aggrandizement and the hope of the religious element of the people for a Catholic empire urged them to brave the hardships of a colder climate to accomplish their purpose. To this end was concentrated all their efforts.

Of necessity, some interior point must be selected capable of being fortified securely against the encroachment of the

dreaded Iroquois and near to some summer meeting place of a large Indian nation. It must, if possible, have an outlet to the ocean other than by way of the Great Lakes, Fort St. Louis (Starved Rock) fulfilled all of these conditions, but was not definitely established as an inland fortress until La Salle had absolutely determined that the Mississippi discharged into the ocean. The point selected was the beetling bluff on the south side of the Illinois river near Utica, Illinois, that rises almost abruptly 125 feet from the south shore of the Illinois river, the ravines at either side and at its rear cutting it out from the rest of the bluff. One mile west on the north side of the river was the Indian town Kaskaskia, the first of its name in the state, where 20,000 Indians gathered annually. The top of the Rock, about an acre in extent, could be palisaded readily, affording an impregnable fortress where 100 men could contend successfully against 10,000. After La Salle returned from the discovery of the Great River in February, 1682, he began the erection of this fortress, or rather, it should be said, he directed Henri De Tonty to erect it. La Salle's education was of the cloister, not of the field of battle or its contentions, but his mercantile ancestry had endowed him with the ability to estimate very shrewdly the future possibilities of this inland empire as well as the immediate returns from the fur trade. To provide for his want of the science of war he had selected Henry de Tonty, an educated soldier, trained in the military schools of France, and with a large experience in her wars. Tonty and the men under him constructed the palisaded fort on The Rock and three others for its protection. In La Salle's memoir to King Louis just before he sailed to the mouth of the Mississippi, he mentions the fact that four forts had been erected for the protection of his colony. Tonty reports the forts complete in March, 1683. The writer has been enabled to locate all of these forts. First, the one on the Rock itself; second, the one at Marseilles, about the center of the Grand Rapids of the Illinois river; third, the one at Wedron opposite the mouth of Indian creek, and also on the rapids

of the Fox river about nine miles northeast of Ottawa, Illinois; and the last, the irregular fortification about 2,400 feet south of The Rock itself. All of these three latter ones were simply outpost fortifications placed at strategic positions to protect the main fortress on The Rock from the approach of enemies. Some knowledge of the rapids of the rivers and the means of transportation then in vogue makes the military genius of Tonty quite evident. As previously stated, all transportation was by birch bark canoe, fragile among the rocks and stones of the rapids, but exceedingly serviceable in deep water, and very readily transported overland because of its lightness, readily breaking bulk at any rapids occurring on the journey. The fort at Wedron is near the head of the rapids of the Fox river and opposite the mouth of Indian creek, which for some distance up stream has cut out quite a gorge before it debouches into the river, affording an excellent hiding place for a large band of Indians. The fort at Marseilles is located on what was at one time a partial island and about the centre of the Grand Rapids of the Illinois. A portion of the old Indian trail, running past this fort, was shown the writer some years ago by an old settler. The evidences of French occupation are not wanting in the shape of silver crosses, Indian axes, and ornaments. Both of the forts just spoken of are located along the rapids, and in localities through which an enemy must necessarily pass to reach Fort St. Louis. The fortification south of The Rock was to guard the insidious approach of an enemy down through the many ravines occurring there. A lookout was kept on duty on The Rock all the time, especially in summer, when large raids were most likely to occur, who could readily detect a smoke by day or a fire by night, or any other pre-arranged signals if an enemy approached, and the main fortress put in defensive order. As previously stated, lurking bands of hostiles were to be found almost everywhere with whom each single fort could contend with

success, but with a large raid of sufficient size to overpower the outpost some method of notification to the main fortress must be employed. The needs of La Salle for the protection of his stores at The Rock became apparent to Tonty, who accordingly planned and had constructed these outposts in such strategic positions that should a large raid occur, the fortress would know of it and be prepared.

At one time for six days the fortress under Tonty successfully withstood all that the Iroquois could do against it. There are recorded instances of its resistance to its enemies. So strong had its protecting influence seemed to the Indians of the Illinois nation, even after its abandonment by the French, that when Pontiac was killed by an Iroquois about 1770, the tribes that had been confederated with that celebrated chieftain for the extermination of murderous people, waging a war of extinction against the Illinois, whose last stand was made upon this memorable Rock, but to sing their death song when hunger and thirst had accomplished their work. From this wholesale slaughter of a nation, it is known to us as Starved Rock.

Simon Crosier, a very early settler of Utica, Illinois, who visited The Rock in 1825, told the writer that the ground was literally covered with human bones.

The fort maintained a force of from 50 to 100 men resident on or near The Rock. The commandant was duly appointed by the Intendant of Canada, holding office during his pleasure. After the death of La Salle, Tonty presented to the king a memorial for military employment. In recognition of his services, Fort St. Louis was transferred to himself and La Forest, another of La Salle's lieutenants. It should be said, rather, that the fur trade was transferred to them, for the land was in a measure valueless at that time. A few months afterwards, Tonty having been called away on some military expedition, La Forest sold the one-fourth part to Henry Achean (spelled Aco in the deed). According to a tradition of some of the old residents on the Ameri-

can Bottom, the immorality of the French soldiers compelled the Indians of the Illinois nation to drive out the people of the Fort. Father Charlevoix, who visited Illinois in 1721, saw nothing of the fortress but the blackened ruins of the stockade.